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Independence is just a myth / Conversation with László Szentesi Zöldi

„Interviewing a colleague with whom we share the same vision and set of values is easy, or even entertaining; refreshingly complicit. However, a colleague is always somewhat similar to the doctor who falls ill. They make us sweat, we have to pay attention to them more intensely, we have to be more prepared, especially if we're craving their recognition. We shouldn't even be surprised if the roles get reversed from time to time. I sincerely hope that the last piece of this series will not leave the readers who followed the conversations disappointed, and I hope it won't disappoint László Szentesi Zöldi, either, who is one of my few role models. Our discourse will touch upon the changes in the situation of journalism from the transition to democracy till the present time, we will discuss why the concept of independent journalism is a myth and what Hungarians have to do if they want to survive the challenges of modern-day migration.”

László Szentesi Zöldi, *author, journalist, senior colleague of the weekly journal, Demokrata*⁵²

If I'm not mistaken, you have personally experienced how the situation of the press changed after the transition to democracy.

I became a journalist in 1993 and I ended up at the Hungarian Television, in the office of the editor-in-chief of foreign policy due to a fortunate coincidence. I'm sure older readers

⁵² In English the title of the journal translates to Democrat.

remember the program, *Panorama*; its editor in chief was Alajos Chrudinák. I can honestly say that I was thrown in deep water, right into the middle of the media-war at the age of 24. The Hungarian Socialist Party won the election a year later and the operation of the Hungarian Television ceased to exist in its prior form. Editorial teams were liquidated; employees were laid off or have become members of the central staff.

Wasn't the first Fidesz government able to substantially enter the media?

They couldn't have been able to because meanwhile the media market had changed. In 1993-1994, the country was informed via the Hungarian Television, a few national and county newspapers, and the Hungarian Radio... This was all the available media platform. There were a few smaller associations, the Danube Television, some local television channels but these did not really make a difference. The first commercial television stations and many newspapers came about by 1998, when the first Fidesz government was formed. Tabloid press started to build up and it has become popular; new and different platforms emerged with the purpose of providing information. At the beginning of the '90s whoever got their hands on the Hungarian Television practically came into possession of one of the most important premises of information in the country. From 1998 this has changed. In 1998, Fidesz was not able to retain the press organizations that stood close to them ideologically; this eventually took place in 2002-2003 only.

Why?

Due to the lost election of 2002 a lot of things got rearranged within Fidesz, radical changes took place in the mindset of the leadership. This defeat had a real cleansing effect. If you remember, on the one hand, they barely managed to turn the first-round results around in the second round, and on the other hand, although Fidesz ended up losing the battle, the conservative right obtained such ammunition, such fuel with the civil circle movement that it ended up following them for many years to come. It has sprouted out of the election of 2002 that Fidesz has began organizing itself into a major party. Perhaps it was in those hours of failure that the idea of forming a people's party had first seen the light of day and a slow building process started. The birth of HírTV was an important step of this process; this medium has been the flagship of the conservative right from the beginning. But the union of newspapers was just as important. In 2000, two daily papers, the *Napi Magyarország* and the *Magyar Nemzet*⁵³ united under the name of the latter one, and for the call of Viktor Orbán the conservative opposition started to subscribe to the *Magyar Nemzet* and the *Demokrata* in massive numbers. The media market has been rearranged after 2002. The defeat of 2002 and the massive media-building following the election has played a key role in Fidesz becoming as strong as it is today, and it has also resulted in public information becoming more or less balanced.

Is it impossible to govern in such media-headwinds?

Whoever informs the people, owns the country, this statement holds today as well. It's the same everywhere. But things have become even more complicated in the past years because the press monopolies that had existed before have been entirely liquidated by the

53 In English the titles of these newspapers are Daily Hungary and Hungarian Nation.

spreading of the world wide web. The market of daily papers and the printed press is not that important anymore. A new generation has grown up that doesn't need these types of journalism, they prefer gaining information from the internet. It seems to me that the battle is over, aside from a few professional journals and lifestyle magazines, the market of daily papers and printed press in general may have another 10-20 years left.

It's a fact that reading habits have changed; I've noticed it on myself, as well.

Other people experience the same, I've read an article by Albert Gazda (*journalist and senior associate at Magyar Nemzet – editor*) in which he complained to himself that in the past he used to read literary journals, he subscribed for periodicals and studied contemporary literature, and then he gradually started to rely on the internet. And when I was reading this I realized that I do the same, because while I didn't read contemporaries, I've always read books on history and literature. Indeed, with the internet becoming increasingly widespread people are getting lazy and books have fallen out of the hands of an entire generation. So, for a few years now, I forcefully make myself read a bit, at least at night. For example, I am currently reading an old book from István Nemeskürty⁵⁴ about Bálint Balassi.⁵⁵ I wouldn't have thought that I'd be reading something like this, but I am actually enjoying it a lot and there are two-three books ready for action next to my bed. So, we must read.

Nemeskürty writes about history in an informative style.

Yes, but that's pretty much the most I can handle after a long day of work. For a long time now, I've given up on and I'm not interested in the works of abstract authors, or the deeper, hidden meaning of inextricably linked artistic creations. I might have become primitive, but all I need is a comedy, or an exciting crime movie with adventure and action that glues me to the screen. When people are twenty-something they are open to all kinds of artistic works, we experiment and are excited to look into the workshops of artists, but being 47 years old, I'm not really interested in these anymore. However, the deeper meaning of things in literature, for example, intrigues me and the adventure and excitement in works of art carry more meaning for me than the different mannered variations of self-expression.

As conservative journalists, what were your experiences during the period when the previous governments barely gave you any room and opportunity to publish? At the time, we really did not have freedom of press, although the present-day opposition keeps complaining about the lack of it today.

It's easy for the generation of the young liberal left to talk about disproportionate media when they have absolutely no idea about what it means to be truly vulnerable. I, however, am able to recall individuals and fates. I remember the unilateral media terror of the '90s, when literally everything was in the hands of the left; socialist, liberal owners and editors controlled the complete Hungarian media market. In fact, aside from a daily paper or two, like the Magyar Fórum⁵⁶ and the Demokrata, and the *Vasárnapi Újság*⁵⁷, a program on the

54 István Nemeskürty (1925-2015) was a Hungarian historian, writer, screenwriter and film producer.

55 Bálint Balassi (1554-1594) was a Hungarian Renaissance lyric poet.

56 In English the title of this newspaper is Hungarian Forum.

57 In English the title of this radio program is Sunday Paper.

Hungarian Radio, the Hungarian right did not appear in any way in any media platform for years. That was point zero from where we have managed to get where we are today – it is a huge accomplishment. And what was going on back then? Well, existential doubts. I was lucky to be in my twenties with no family. I took it easy, I spent whatever I earned. But I knew colleagues with families who drank themselves to death; another committed suicide, and these are really awful memories. I don't have a desire to get back at them but after these beginnings, I don't want anybody to expect me to say a single kind word about people like Ádám Horváth (*president of the Hungarian Television between 1994-1995 - editor*) or Ferenc Székely (*editor in chief of Napkelte*⁵⁸ *after the transition to democracy, in 1996 executive president of Hungarian Television as vice-president – editor*), or the entire leadership of the Hungarian Television for that matter that provided assistance to the power games of Gyula Horn with no compunction. I could mention dozens of people who used to be powerful, but today seem to be very forgetful. But we were there and remember how they, who had the power over life and death, executed Panorama and the News in 1994. It took them half an hour, sitting in a meeting. I've read from Ferenc Székely on social media today that he doesn't remember this. Well, we do, because we were there. It would be beneficial for the younger generation of journalists to keep these things in mind as a memento, or at least a lesson learned. Clearly, it's not their battle, it's not even mine, but it's an uncomfortable memory and it makes me see the characters and the bias of the media in a different light.

Are we able to express the publishing platforms in numbers in order to reflect how balanced or unbalanced the Hungarian press is? For example, if a party in opposition with 1% of voters behind them is over-represented, why do they complain about the end of free press?

I'm not sure that questions of free press or balanced media distribution should be represented through the parties, in fact, I'd warn against doing so. On the other hand, it's a fact that while the opposition won't stop talking about the end of free press, Index⁵⁹ is accessed and read in way larger numbers than the newspapers and internet portals that belong to the right. The number of media outlets in the possession of Mediaworks⁶⁰ is not the point here, what matters is how easy they are to access and how large their influencing ability is. The right is still way behind the left in this aspect. In the past twenty-something years, it wasn't just political journalism that had been taken over by the liberal left. It has conquered more than that, from female and lifetime magazines all the way to the various hobby and professional groups. So, when we read an article about the gardening choices of Gábor Demszky⁶¹, it is exactly the same type of political influencing as the attempts made by political journalism. Despite its visible results, the right-wing media is still in a disadvantageous position in Hungary and it's precisely why the constant moaning of the opposition is incomprehensible and unacceptable. If we really did not have freedom of press then we would have to read about Viktor Orbán's family in every newspaper, like

58 In English the title of this television program is Sunrise.

59 Index.hu is one of the most popular liberal news portals.

60 Mediaworks is one of the largest media enterprises in Hungary.

61 Gábor Demszky was the leftist Mayor of Budapest between 1990 and 2010, also a founding member of the Alliance of Free Democrats party.

we did in the dictatorships of the past. If there was no freedom of press then everybody, or at least most of the press, would have to write in a fashion that reflects the views of Fidesz. But that's not what's happening at all. Because there is freedom of press in Hungary, everyone writes whatever he or she wants. Publications against the current government are published every day and I say that's fine. The issue is that when we have a right-wing government, the accusation immediately comes that there's no freedom of press, while naturally, while they were governing the country the pulsation of plural democracy could be sensed all over the place.

Do we have anything to learn about collaboration from the liberal left media? Are they more cooperative than the pro-government media outlets?

This view of the leftist media being well organized and cooperative compared to the right-wing counterpart, which is portrayed sluggish and clumsy, is a leftover from the '90s. I disagree with it. It may have been true then, because there barely had been any right-wing media outlets, but in the present, the leftist media isn't any more professional or cooperative in any segment than the right-wing. The latter one had just been built up in the past years, the people that are present in its structure know each other well. Opposed to the journalists who were left behind from the communist era, we are building ourselves up from a Hungary of democratic spirit, which means that we are able to work together without any distracting convulsions. Of course, there are problems here and there, but don't think for a second that they don't rip at each other in the opposition media. What they and their politicians pour over each other, the way they argue about methods and slices of truth is nearly reaching a level of amateurism that we never want to be associated with. You ask what we can learn from them. In my opinion, nothing. In the '90s they had a situational advantage: frequently going abroad, speaking languages and so on. Meanwhile, a new generation grew up and I see young and talented journalists, political scientists and other professionals around me who will easily put them in their pockets. There are also many well-prepared and skilled people on their side, and equally, we see plenty of deadbeats and born-losers on both sides. But the alleged advantage that may have been present 20 years ago is gone without a trace by now.

What kind of attitudes do the young ones pick up by the time they finish their education in the fields of media or journalism?

There's a saying that people get old when they start claiming that their own generation was way better than the new one. Each generation has its talented and talentless members. It is true, however, that we differ in terms of certain skills. The importance of classical education, literacy and philosophy of knowledge are definitely less emphasized in the past 20-30 years. I think that many of those things that I had to learn in order to get my degree are not even taught at universities today. University education has weakened; there are elite schools and random universities at street corners. Today, the sentence structures, intellect, writing skills of young people are much weaker than what we had when we started our careers. Not to mention the fact that a lot of people simply don't read books, they are stuck at the level of a high school degree or university diploma. In my opinion, Hungarian prose has to be included in the curriculum of a Hungarian journalist, Móricz,

Kosztolányi, Mikszáth, Gárdonyi were all excellent journalists. In their novels, vignettes and reports the profession itself is pulsating. Truth be told, a journalist who wants to be taken seriously, shouldn't be paying attention to other journalists in order to snatch a bit of masterful skills, they need to read Kosztolányi's prose and they'll immediately get the picture. What are young people better at? They move around in the world with more confidence, they are free to go wherever they want, they speak languages. We had to make strenuous efforts in order to gain even an intermediate level of English knowledge. When I started, it wasn't in the air at all that some time later in my life I might be able to use it when I'm in London or Los Angeles. I remember when I was searching for something to read in English in the library of Szentes in the middle of the '80s. Aside from the poems of Robert Burns and the British communists' paper called *Morning Star* I barely found anything. It was a splendid motivation to learn the language.

Do present-day journalists copy each other?

Yes, it often happens that some journalist who can really make a powerful impact generates dozens of epigones. Here is my dear friend, Zsolt Bayer, as an example, whose choices of words, sentence structures are borrowed by many who later present these as their own. There are quite a few epigones of Zsolt Bayer in the country, just like there are many Péter Uj and Árpád Tóta W. epigones. This is due to the lack of ability and interest. I taught part-time at Károli⁶² for a year and I saw the students majoring in communication – well, the situation is quite crushing. Out of 30 people there may have been three or four who were interested in professional issues, but I must say, *they* were really good. The other 26 were reading *Cosmopolitan*, scratching themselves and gazing out the window. Which is not a problem, but the question arises, are we sure that it is necessary to get useless university degrees in today's world? Somebody completes a course that will be of no use to them in real life, they lose four or five years, when they could have learnt a trade instead. Everybody wants a degree and it results in people incorrectly assessing their own abilities, they're simply at the wrong place. In today's Hungary hundreds of thousands of people move around at the wrong place, in wrong life situations. We don't assess our abilities and strengths appropriately; we are trying to live up to societal expectations instead. We simply don't measure ourselves at our real value. Why would somebody who works as a gardener, a cosmetician or a carpenter be considered despicable? If you're good at what you do, you can make three times as much as the mediocre amount an intellectual makes. In addition, and it is very important, you can even be a happy individual if you like your job.

Time is necessary for a change of approach, for sure. It hasn't happened in the field of history to this day, the definitions of „us” and „them” have become rigid. What's going on in the field of journalism? Can a journalist, who wrote there yesterday and writes here today, be considered credible?

Let's make a distinction between journalism and political journalism. If someone deals with agriculture, or is a sports journalist, or writes for a tabloid – these things can be easily defined in terms of professional assignments, their political orientation is less relevant. Political journalism is completely different. In Hungary, two opposing sides are standing

62 Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary

head-to-head in the media due to the developmental defects of the past 27 years. It's a fact that the advertising market is unable to maintain the Hungarian press. There may be a few exceptions that are able to stand on their own, but most of the press makes a living out of, therefore, craves for advertisements because the market simply doesn't provide their cost of living. That's why most of the Hungarian political journalism depends on politics itself. After the transition to democracy it has become quite common that the various media associations started suckling on the teat of the state. The respective governments give financial support to those newspapers that have the same preferences as they do and they do not aid the rest. It is what we see today, as well. Of course, it is common to talk about the myth of independent journalism but reality paints a different picture. I think we can be more honest if we accept and verbalize this, instead of lying to ourselves and to others about working as an independent journalist for an independent news outlet. It's often heard that in Hungary there are exclusively two types of media: the right-wing and the independent media. I barely ever hear from people on the left that they are committed to the left-liberal set of values. The most alarming example of this of Gergely Dudás' farewell letter, who used to be editor-in-chief of Index in which he called Index the *watchdog* of democratic values. It's frightening because it shows that even a smart person, like Gergely Dudás, doesn't see that the media outlet that he's been the head of depends on politics just like all the other media platforms do in Hungary.

Based on what you've said, there really isn't left-liberal journalism in Hungary. At least, officially there isn't...

It is simply a pharisaic position. The question is, is it possible to change it, or is it even worth thinking about it? Without wanting to moralize, I think journalists can still adhere to professional and personal principles if they are aware of the political frameworks that surround them. We shouldn't sell a pig in a poke. There are journalists and cadres on both sides. That's the decisive difference. Both sides mutually call each other footman-media and scribes-for-cash, but it's not like I get a call in the morning from László Kövér while I'm shaving and he gives me the rundown of what I should write about that day. It's absurd; it never happened and never will. Self-censorship, on the other hand, is something that occurs on both sides and let's talk honestly about it. Because there are certain topics that we won't write about and there are certain roles that we refuse to play simply because it goes against our taste. The left attempts to unveil the atrocities committed by the government every hour and if they find something they should write about it, thereby contributing to the cleansing of public life. Anyone who reproaches me, being a pro-government journalist, for not criticizing the government, do they think about the following scenario? If somebody works for Coca Cola as a manager, would they commit treachery against their employer and bring sensitive information over to Pepsi? I'm bound by loyalty towards my own editorial team, my colleagues, and my associates I share the same principles with. Our workplace is just like any other, like a forge-shop or a designer office. I've never been interested in or believed the pseudo-professional blabbering about impartiality. Not to mention the fact that if somebody respects and follows a set of values, then some level of bias, opinion, collision will inevitably appear in their works. I can mention countless journalists who, while floating between the left and right, lies an independence

to himself that has never existed, and they do this to keep their self-esteem intact. They play this game because this way they don't have to ask themselves the uncomfortable question: why do I write this today when yesterday I wrote the exact opposite? Well, that's why I haven't worked a minute for a left-wing paper, not that they called me to do so... That's the way I am and I will remain as such. For me, it's more important to feel good about myself and be able to find the key to my readers' heart than to always fall back on something soft. Those who call me a scrivener-for-cash, merely because they don't agree with what I say, probably forget that I've never spent a single minute working for the other side, not for money, not for anything else. There are people who have; you can find them on both sides. So, maybe these kinds of people really are scriveners-for-cash, although I hate the expression.

We all know so-called independent journalists.

Of course. However, in reality these people are held hostage solely by their own egos, they are full of themselves and insufferable for the most part, they are simply bad people. Everything they do and write is built upon castles in the sky. Because independence is merely a myth, especially in their case, since political journalism is kept on the life-saving respirator by politics itself. That's why it is easy to admit that nobody is independent. Opposed to these people who constantly position themselves in the center, many of us on the right clearly state that we are not independent – unfortunately, you don't see this happen on the left. We don't lie to our readers and ourselves; we don't invoke fundamental professional fairness to claim that we're terribly interested in everybody's opinion. I'm sorry, but what in the world can I possibly discuss with Miklós Tamás Gáspár?⁶³ Or with András Hont?⁶⁴ Would it really be credible if we sat down at a major jamboree and discussed the important questions of life? I absolutely don't like the system of values Miklós Tamás Gáspár has spent his entire life believing in, or the expressions and style Hont uses to write his articles. I can't imagine anything that would be more alien for me; consequently, we have nothing in common at all. What should we negotiate? Every spiritual masturbation that is disguised as a professional forum is a complete waste of time. There used to be a time when I received invitations to take part in such debates, but they don't invite me anymore, as they know that I won't show up. I'd rather cook something or study with my kids at least that has a point.

The things you said about integrity and loyalty rhyme with the words of the historian, László Gulyás who said that Hungarian history should be written with a Hungarian pen out of a Hungarian heart, as it is not our job to provide political ammunition for our opponents. That should be done by someone else, by a Serbian or Romanian historian.

Hungarian history wasn't written as it could have been written based on the facts. It's important because even our generation is held hostage by the 20th century. Just as it can be expected of the Hungarian Jewry that 70 years after the holocaust they overcome what had happened and stop living the tragic fate of their grandparents; it can also be expected of the majority Hungarians that they overcome the shock of Trianon and start thinking in present tense. I know that these are very heavy words, but we have to remember that the greatest

63 Miklós Tamás Gáspár is a philosopher who also publishes articles in the liberal media.

64 András Hont is liberal journalists.

figures of our history have always thought in present tense. In the 1820s István Széchenyi⁶⁵ was researching how the economy, politics and institutional system of Hungary could be reformed reasonably so it would be valid in present tense. He wasn't interested in the grievances the Hungarian nobility has inherited from the age of Joseph II. Although the past is useful and we can learn a lot from it, it is also exceedingly dangerous, we shouldn't spend too much of our time on it. I'm not speaking up against history; I'd just like to call the attention to a typical illness of the Hungarian right. Our attachment to the past is dogmatic; we want to explain everything relying on it, while we have less and less knowledge of it. The feeling of tragedy and being sorry for ourselves have always had a strong presence in the Hungarian fate. I think in the 21st century the good Hungarians are those who are able to overcome Trianon and our self-destructing tendencies. At the same time, there is an anti-national grip present in the country, an approach that wouldn't allow us to survive for another minute in the Carpathian basin. For example, when Réka Kinga Papp⁶⁶ says, „Hungary will be Islamic, so what?” she is talking complete nonsense. Personally, she would really suffer if we became a caliphate because she would have to shell beans all day and she wouldn't have time to formulate such deep philosophical thoughts in her head. So, on the one hand, we have these negative thoughts inherited from the past, all the misery that the new generations are unable to overcome, and on the other hand, an unpatriotic inbreeding is present. The latter ones tend to undervalue the questions that determine the fate of Hungarianness, and if it depended on them, they would hand over the country to any great power in the blink of an eye. Our job, in my opinion, is to find the connection to our predecessors, however narrow our wiggle room is. Our ancestors have done the same task under different circumstances in different forms in the previous centuries, but we have to be able to draw the conclusions in present tense. It's in this that I see the whole purpose of the work we do.

I would like to add something to what you've said just now. While the holocaust is a story that is finalized and has no practical aspect in the present anymore, Trianon impacts our present very much. It's enough to look at the most recent language law in Ukraine. It's as if they kept scratching a scar so it never heals completely.

Yes, but we have our share of the blame, as well. Why is it that we can't honestly look at a Hungarian from Gyergyószentmiklós or Kassa⁶⁷ the same way we look at someone from Zala or Szolnok⁶⁸? People with an otherwise normal perception go to Székely Land and start behaving like a nasty mob. They show off with their forints in Corund, scream irredentist songs, speak nonsense, then go back home. Unless things change, unless we are able to become 21st century Hungarians and find our own forms of expression instead of the forms of the '30s, we will not be able to take a step forward in national matters. Until then we are only able to look at Transylvania as an ethnographic curiosity, a village museum, although it's not what it is. We have to accept those one and a half million people – half of whom live scattered to begin with, so it's a divine miracle that they have pulled through all this time – as partners, as our equal Hungarian fellows. And similarly,

65 István Széchenyi (1791-1860) was a Hungarian politician, political theorist, and writer. In Hungary he is still known to many as “the Greatest Hungarian.”

66 Réka Kinga Papp is a liberal journalist.

67 Towns in Transylvania.

68 Towns in present-day Hungary.

they also have to understand that their mother country, emotionally and physically, can never be Romania, they always have to look towards Hungary and Budapest. The current government has done way more in this regard than any previous did in the past, they've reached fantastic results, and not just in terms of symbolic actions, the expansion of citizenship is really a tangible change. Still, while we're talking about autonomy, have we ever thought about the debts we still owe towards the Hungarians in Moldavia, for example? Why couldn't we open at least a MOL⁶⁹ gas station, or a CBA⁷⁰ store in Lészped or Klézse⁷¹ in the past 27 years? Making Hungarianness a bit more attractive in the Carpathian basin is a task that depends rather on organization and attention than money. And it's still not too late. Of course, besides Moldova, the same applies to the Southland and the Upland; let's admit that we owe them a lot!

It is all true, however, are we talking about the entire 27 years since the transition to democracy? Because the leftist governments have never shown the least amount of affinity towards the Hungarian minorities living outside our borders.

The left-wing governments were simply traitors; there is absolutely no chance that any national sentiment would ever flare up in them. The new young liberals, like the Momentum⁷² and the others, unite their forces specifically against the national thought, they are the antagonists of Hungarians, and there is no point in assuming any kind of responsibility towards or awareness of the nation from them. According to the most recent news, if Fidesz wins in the spring, they are planning large-scale rural development projects and changes in domestic policy. Once these manifest, we might be able to send a message to Hungarians in the Carpathian basin. Because not everybody lives in a Hungarian environment like people do in Székelyudvarhely, Komárom or Zenta. At least 1.5 million Hungarians try to survive scattered in the Carpathian basin and time is running out dangerously.

I'm not letting go of the question of independence; you've asserted that there is no independent journalism today and I agree with you. Has it ever existed?

Yes, sure. For example, a few years ago there was a daily paper called Reggel,⁷³ they really were independent, they existed for a year, if I remember correctly.

Very funny!

It's a rather sad story. That was the market demand, and it had to be closed down. Look, people don't know what to do with independent journalism either, because although the readers or viewers keep saying that „I want to get information from multiple sources,” deep inside their heart they have their own well-defined standpoint in this extremely divided country. In this fired up Hungarian society the spark of a counter-opinion is just enough to bring resistance out of you. I'd be really curious to see that if a choir of angels descended from above the clouds and gave us a load of money that the two of us could use to create an independent newspaper how many people would buy it in the country.

69 MOL Group is a Hungarian leading international, integrated oil and gas company.

70 CBA is a Hungarian grocery store chain.

71 Towns in Transylvania.

72 Momentum is a liberal opposition party formed in 2017.

73 In English the title of the paper is Morning.

We hear it mostly from the opposition parties that there are many non-voters; they have to be targeted as they are the biggest group in Hungary but that's not true. Fact is, voters can be divided into three major groups: the right-wing, the left-wing and the silent block, the latter one is fed up with everybody. Those who are in this group never go to vote, so you'll never be able to reach about 30% of the population who are otherwise eligible to vote. These people don't read anything related to politics, they don't have a political opinion, and they don't find anybody they'd want to elect. To revisit the idea of independent journalism, another reason why I'd advise caution is that people don't expect independence. What is there to be independent of anyway? If you want to be independent it means that you don't have your own tone of voice, you don't dare articulate an opinion in certain matters. Most publications of media that pretend to be independent are atrocious essays that I would throw right back at the author if I was their editor, they cannot be published, as they take a step to the left then another to the right. It's not what readers expect. People follow some of the star journalists like the children of Hamelin followed the rat catcher. The readers search for their own opinions, they look in the mirror and it delights them if they see themselves, it's a feedback, a confirmation for them that it's not just *them* who think in a certain way. Regardless, if somebody thinks that their fake-independence is the most important factor, they won't be able to write anything else but sloppy, untrue essays.

Why is it that the number of female journalists is so low in Hungary? If it is, indeed, low.

I don't think that's true, if you look around here in the editorial team, third or even half of the staff is female, and it is a political journal. Maybe what you mean is why women are not taken seriously enough despite the fact that they have the same abilities and do the same job as men. That might have some truth to it. But as we all know, women and men are different; one of the virtues of men – which is also a vice – is that they go straight ahead like a bull, and they don't stop until they hit a wall. Women fundamentally tend to avoid conflicts. Hitting the wall, breaking through the door are things that are considered valuable in political journalism, while attitudes like willingness to compromise and avoiding conflicts are not seen as values. As a consequence, tougher, more assertive and more masculine ladies get on better in political journalism. When you have to write about something tough, when you have to put yourself out there, when you have to confront a minister at a press conference – all these are conflict situations.

This genre doesn't suit women that well, that's clear. For instance, under my own name I would never write down the things that I write under a pseudonym on my political blog, and even if I did, I would be much less read.

It certainly may be true, but I wouldn't draw further conclusions.

No, that's not what I meant either.

Sure, I know, but on the liberal side they keep saying that it's a men's world, which is nonsense, the sole reason behind it is conflict avoidance. How good it is, though, that there are so many creative women among interior decorators. It is quite interesting that I've written a number of books, but mostly men in their 50s and 60s came to my press-views

if my books dealt with the topics of politics or history. But it was always the case, really. Then, when I wrote a cookbook many young women showed up. The pool of people was completely different. Lifestyle, hobby, family and recreation are women's topics, they paddle in joy when they have to furnish a house, shop or the topic of healthy lifestyle and child raising comes up in a discussion. All these are just as valuable, if not more valuable, than presence in public life. The problem arises when we start saying – and it is a mandatory dogma of the left since Ibsen's Nora – that women have an innate right to break out of the dollhouse, leave their families and husbands because their primary job is self-actualization. In European societies, this breakthrough took place 120 years ago, in Hungary the decades of socialism and the 25 years of liberalism equally made things worse. At the end, we'll be standing there, staring at each other like idiots and won't be able to find our own sexual roles. We have the Marton case⁷⁴ here which is way past the director as a person, and however unspoken, it is precisely about these issues.

You brought up Réka Kinga Papp a little while ago who, in that particular interview, spoke a lot about female emancipation and the despicable male dominance currently present in Hungary. Then, she easily claimed that it's not a big deal if Europe becomes muslim, or according to her, Islam. Does she really not feel the irresolvable conflict between female emancipation and Islam?

No, she doesn't. Liberals only have theses; they completely exclude life, and the need to be lifelike from their deliberations. They focus on living up to their ideology, so if the statement is that Islam is not a threat to us, while on the other hand, the nation state is bad, then they will keep twisting the words until they align them with their thesis. And it doesn't matter to them that reality contradicts their presuppositions every minute. The entire leftist line of thought is derailed from the beginning because the left, liberalism and socialism are counter-reactions, revolutions against the natural philosophy of life, or I could say, against the natural instincts of mankind. People are just the way they are. Only liberals have these illusions. People, who think, consider the good as well as the bad and they don't just keep babbling about endless peace, advancement and revolutionary innovations if the price to pay for them is the disintegration of the old, natural bonds. People, themselves, want order. They live in a hierarchy, they have duties besides their rights, there is always a leader, and there are male and female roles. Supporting our families is very important; we think about the future, we plant a tree so our grandchildren can enjoy the walnuts because we won't be around to do so. But they formulated a new ideology in Europe 300 years ago in order to destroy the old one and instead, create egalitarian, equal societies.

Are we talking about the French revolution?

Definitely, yes. While the background of the French revolution was without a doubt empiricism and rationalism, the agony of the old Europe started, in fact, with the French Revolution. By now, for the 21st century, we got to the point where there are people in Scandinavia and Germany who sit in their chairs like idiots, and women breastfeed together with Syrian mothers because there is a program that promotes joint breastfeeding

⁷⁴ László Marton is a contemporary theater director who was accused of alleged sexual harassment by various females he had worked with.

with refugee mothers. And the men just look on by as their wives are being raped; it's not a problem, since who knows how long it's been since that poor „refugee” was with a woman for the last time. Let's not forget that these people's grandfathers fought in the Wehrmacht and were killed in action at the Eastern front. Former fighters have now become helpless victims; 70 years of brainwashing have completely destroyed Germany. Not to mention the Scandinavians who have always lived in abundance, they are on their last legs; I think that the old Sweden has less than 30 years left. Some kind of an Islamic party will emerge and form a government in the country where Vikings were running up and the down the place 1,000 years ago.

Do you think that the same fate is awaiting us, Hungarians? Is it bound to happen?

We, Eastern Europeans have very different experiences. As long as we continue to think of mothers, families, male roles, everyday life, our remaining European Christian values, our surroundings as we do today, we will be safe. If we gave this up, as the liberals suggest that we do, everything we call Hungary now would be flooded by sand in three minutes. But that will ever happen, because Hungarians are very tenacious, our strength is in our ability to survive. We are not like the Irish who form a league against and overthrow the English rule. No, we flee to the marsh then we return and rebuild the village, the church, and the school. Then the Turks or the Tatars come and destroy everything again, but we rebuild it again, we continue to regain ownership of our land – the period of the middle ages was all about this for Hungary. And the situation we're in today is somewhat similar. Not everyone is able to do this, but the best of Hungarians are. If in the end only 100,000 of us remain, then that 100,000 of us will do the same thing again. It's a long-term situation and we can trust the vital instinct of Hungarians. One of the greatest challenges of the future is finding the common ground with our neighbors, the Slovaks, the Romanians, the Serbians, and the others who are more similar to us than we'd think. I wonder, will we be able to say at some point that Trianon and the centuries long struggles are less important for us than the new global challenges that we are facing? Are there going to be people with a similar way of thinking in the neighboring countries? Perhaps we will receive answers to these questions in the next few decades. Whether we will be able to offer a hand to each other when facing a visible new enemy, or we'll continue playing our petty games until all of us will have sunk in the turmoil of migration.



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